

IS THERE A GREATER NUMBER OF INCOMPETENT VOCAL TEACHERS IN ST. LOUIS THAN IN OTHER AMERICAN CITIES?



MME. NELLIE MELBA



MME. LILLIAN NORDICA

TWO FAMOUS
SINGERS OF CONTRASTING TYPES

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

A great number of the vocal teachers in St. Louis are impostors and ruin him who is of voice annually," declares Victor Kurland, a prominent teacher who practices exclusively for the stage.

"The vast majority are looking only for the money. There comes a point in from some country town who has had her voice trained by the best local teacher, she may have nothing to recommend her to a better teacher, and her voice may wholly lack quality, yet she is taken into the fold, her voice treated by the method which the conservatory to which she goes has upon as the proper one, then in two years or three she is graduated.

"Then she goes home to teach others. She must strain her larynx and she teaches singing without ever having learned to sing.

"A case in point is that of a well-known actor in St. Louis. He had a good voice and an engaging stage presence, together with the artistic temperament that is absolutely a necessity for success in operatic work.

"He thought that he might be able to improve his voice, which was reasonable, and began to take lessons of a teacher in St. Louis who prepares for the stage. TALK PLACIDLY BUT NOT WEISLY ABOUT TECHNICALITIES.

"After two years what is the result? His voice is ruined. I could mention a number of teachers, some of whom have many pupils, who have absolutely no idea as to the proper way in which to produce a musical tone. They get together a lot of technicalities of which they know only the name, and talk fluently, if not wisely, on the pharynx and larynx, the glottis and the epiglottis, but not one of them could tell you what part any of these organs play in tone production. How can they show another what they have never learned themselves?"

Fred W. Norsch of No. 1113 Grand avenue, when asked his opinion on the state of vocal teaching in St. Louis laughed.

"There is no doubt," he said, "that a great number of those posing as teachers and accepting fees from pupils could be prosecuted for obtaining money under false pretenses.

"One pupil told me that she had taken a lesson when she was asked for it or less \$2.50. She called him, 'professor,' she called him, 'doctor' and she went to have her throat sprayed before giving her the lesson. The vocal cords when she came to me a week later were highly inflamed.

"TEACHERS WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN VOCAL ORGANS.

"When a pupil comes to me I make a thorough examination of the throat, and if there is anything radically wrong it must be corrected before they are accepted.

"I have known teachers to accept pupils whose tonsils were so large that when they tried to sing the higher notes the space between the uvula, which lies at the back of the palate, and the tonsils on the sides was so small that no use could be made of the resonance chambers in the back of the throat and a perfect tone was impossible.

"There are teachers in St. Louis who have never seen the vocal cords in all their lives. They teach by imitation alone.

"Some of these insist that a pupil with a high voice should go to a teacher with a similar range of tone, and likewise those whose voices are baritone should go to an alto or a bass.

"That is all wrong, and the teacher who gives such advice or tries to influence pupils on such grounds teaches by imitation alone and cannot explain to the pupil how the organs should be controlled to produce the tone.

"Few of the teachers understand what is meant by breathing, what organs besides the lungs are co-ordinated in the act of taking in air.

"Have you ever seen Melba or Nordica breathe? They can force the air from the bottom of their lungs and use all their lung capacity. This conserves the breath.

"Contrast with their method that of the untrained or poorly trained singer.

"The top part of each lung makes convulsive movements and forces a little of the capacity of the lungs into use. When this is used up the air in the bottom of the lungs rushes up, and instead of adding in the sound production, it only takes the place of that which is used up from the top of the organs.

"In other words, their diaphragm aids them not a bit, while in Melba's case it does the major portion of the work. I could make a practical demonstration of this by setting a well-trained singer working against one poorly trained.

"The latter would get out of breath in half the distance covered by the well-trained artist.

SEVERAL METHODS OF DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING.

"While I do not know the method pursued by others, I can tell you that which I use myself," was the statement of Mrs. Stella Kestelag Haines.

"In the matter of breathing I cannot tolerate the abdominal style. There are several methods of diaphragmatic breathing, depending on how that organ is used to support the lungs.

"I prefer the method with the brace from the front rather than from the back of the chest cavity.

"The tone should be focused on the front of the palate, and the sensation to the performer is as though the tone was coming in rather than going out.

"The vocal should be held up, so that the space behind it, or resonance chamber, as it is called, may be used to reinforce the tone.

"The tone should seem to bore its way through the palate rather than come around it. There is a distinct sense of vibration in the palate of the performer that causes this illusion.

"As to the proper carriage when singing, that taught the cadets at West Point as the proper position of a soldier is, to mind, correct.

"This consists of standing perfectly erect, with the abdomen drawn in.

"The lungs are held high and the chin is drawn in. The eyes meet the ground at a distance of about thirty feet, and under no consideration is the head to be thrown back or the chin allowed to point upward.

"There is only one point about the lips that I emphasize, and I have great trouble with it. Pupils come to me who have been told to hold the upper lip down.

"This is not necessary and the natural effect of the face is spoiled. Otherwise the lips are to be held in proper position to enunciate the words of the song in the most exact manner.

"The position of the tongue is modified to suit the sound. Most of the vowels are sounded on the tongue, and this organ is constantly changing its position."

SPECIALIST DISCUSSES THE MOOTED QUESTION.

To get the views of an expert on the vocal organs, the nose and the throat, a specialist in these lines was consulted.

Doctor Oscar P. Hartman, professor of diseases of the nose and throat at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, said:

"There is no doubt in my mind that 99 per cent of the money being paid out for vocal lessons in St. Louis is absolutely wasted.

"It would be hard to find a city where more inefficient persons pose as vocal teachers and vocalists than here.

"If you could watch, as I have done, the rehearsals of some of the big choruses here and see the efforts to attack notes that were impossible for the singers, you would agree with me.

"Yet one of the worst of these singers came to me after a rehearsal and asked my aid in securing pupils. I learned that she had taken lessons for two years while she was a saloonmaid at Nugent's.

"From one she bought a few 'methods of vocal teaching.' From the other she bought printed cards, and set to work.

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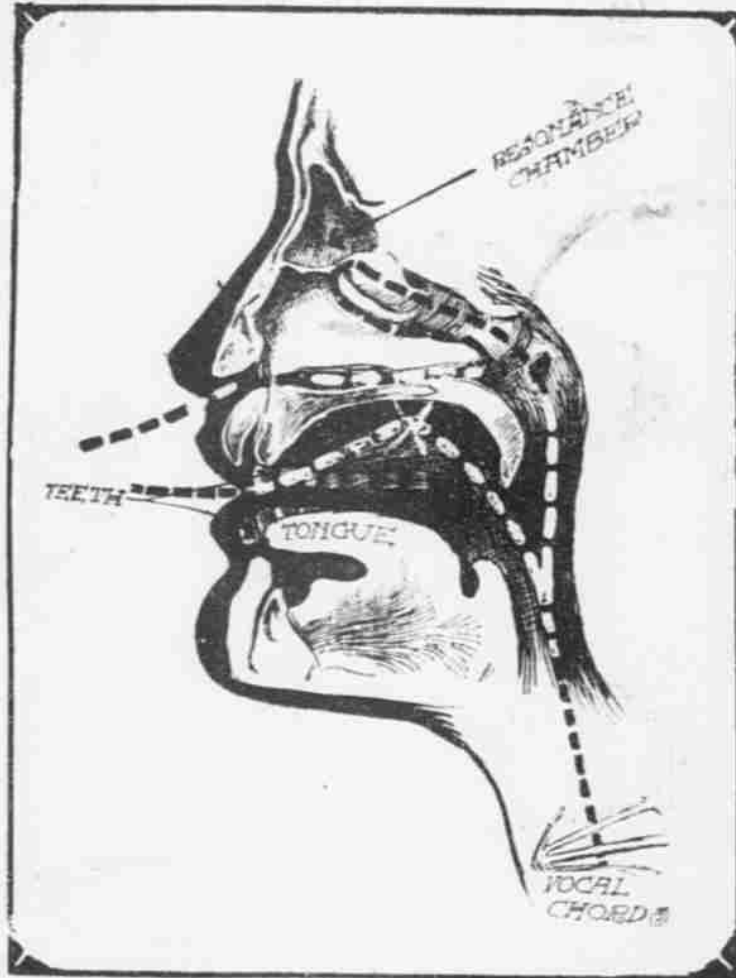
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SECTIONAL VIEW OF ORGANS USED IN SINGING.

Cavities of the mouth and head that work together in the production of a musical tone if properly trained.

She was no more fitted to teach vocal music than a Missouri mule.

"It is only a question of time till she leaves the poorer quarters where she is located and takes a 'soudie' in the Grand avenue district.

"Girls have come to me for operations which their teachers recommended as necessary, when the fact of the matter was that the voice had been misused until only a prolonged rest would prevent a general breakdown of the vocal organs.

"DRIFT WHO WAS LOSING HER VOICE.

"One young woman came to me to find out why she was losing her voice and to be treated for hoarseness.

"I could see that she had been straining her voice in some way or other and asked her what voice she ordinarily sang.

"She replied that she was an alto, but that her teacher had lately begun to sing her 'upper register.'

"When I spoke to one of the two singers that ever came to St. Louis about this 'upper and lower register,' he said: 'This you speaking of a steam-heated flat is a human voice? The flat, if more than one story, may have an 'upper register,' but this cannot be applied to the human voice.'

"I knew a young woman who often sang at her friends' houses. She had a fair voice and set out to have it cultivated, she went to a capable teacher at first, but he left her singing exercises for two months while she thought she ought to be singing ballads.

"So she went to a 'conservatory' and asked if it was not possible to learn to sing by some other easier method. She was told that they could teach her to sing by the 'ballad method,' and she never sang another exercise.

"Teaching singing is nothing more than training the pores used in tone production just as an athlete trains his muscles.

"He goes through strenuous exercises and others designed to grapple his muscles, and so a singer's exercises.

"Singing does demand attention in this, that one must have intelligence, talent and a good vocal mechanism or the training is useless."

There have been actresses who objected to a photographic improvement on nature, but they are few and far between.

At the dress rehearsal comes the flashlight ordeal, one much dreaded, for even Venus would appear haggard under the glare of this process. But publicity demands it and the actress must again obey.

At last comes the first night, and the first day that the actress is not obliged to rehearse unless a last alteration has been decided upon by author or management.

It is quite likely that the final dress rehearsal has been concluded.

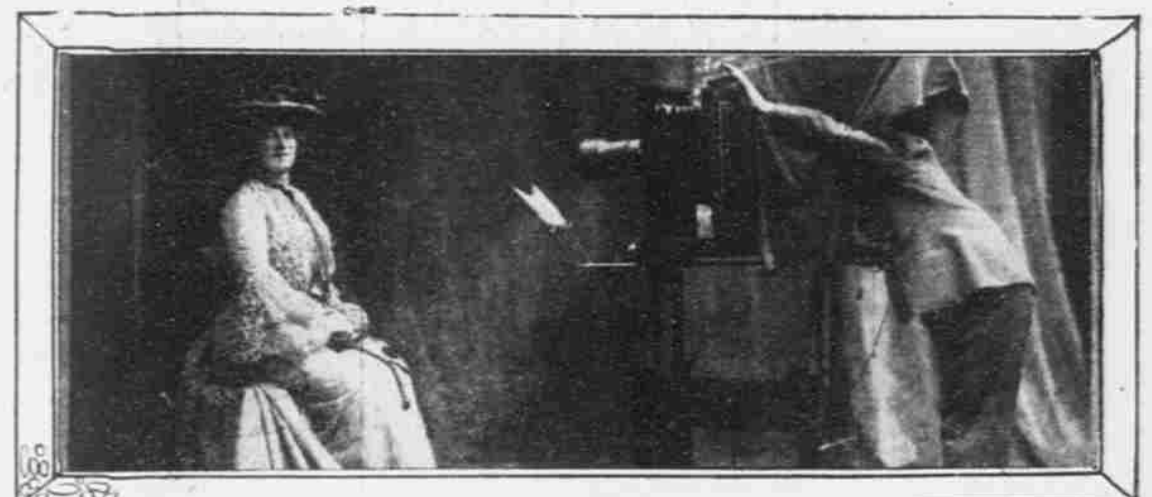
They have been known to begin at 6 o'clock in the evening and end at that hour in the morning.



TRYING FOR A HIGH NOTE.
The higher the note the more twisted the mouth.



WATCHING ORGANS IN THE MIRROR.
Trick used by inefficient teachers in place of exact instruction.



THE ORDEAL OF BEING PHOTOGRAPHED FOR PUBLICITY PURPOSES.



ANNIE FISCHER
Signing a contract with Manager Henry B. Harris.

Asked how she felt when the curtain rang up at Wallack's on the opening night of "Mrs. Jack" last September, Miss Fischer replied: "Seaside. And," she continued, "when I make my second appearance as a star at the Bijou Theater on January 25 in "Who's the Matter With Susan?" I will undoubtedly feel more "seaside."

There exists a popular impression that the players sit all night waiting for the first call of the newboy in order to leave at the earliest possible moment the verdict of the critics.

As a matter of fact they are so "harassed" by the strain of many weeks' preparation and the culminating excitement of the first night that the relaxation experienced when the die is cast leaves them unresponsive to either success or failure.

BEFORE THE "FIRST NIGHT."

TRIALS OF THE ACTRESS WHO PLAYS A LEADING PART.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

First-nighters, even those familiar with the workings of the theater, seated in judgment upon the initial essay of an actress in an untried play, comprehend but slightly the arduous preparatory process.

When a manager announces that he will shortly produce a new play, the actress, if she has a personal acquaintance with him or his stage manager, immediately calls at the office of the firm.

Otherwise she urges her claims through one or the other of the dramatic agencies, and, armed with a letter of commendatory introduction, presents herself.

When the actress and the producer come to a conclusion regarding the role and the remuneration there is still, in nine cases out of ten, the author to be reckoned with. Frequently he reserves the right to select his interpreters—so the applicant must convince him of her capability to enact

his ideas. Sometimes it is necessary for her to give a reading of the part.

When the actress has listened patiently to the suggestions as regards characterization, make-up and dress, from author, producer and stage manager, she returns to her apartment, estimates how the various winds of opinion and yet steer the ship in the direction she has privately marked out, then applies herself to the memorization of the words and "business" of her role.

QUESTION OF DRESS.

When rehearsals are well under way the all important topic of dress is broached.

The leading woman secures first selection of colors, the "heavy" the next, the ingenue the third, and so on throughout the company with regard to the feminine importance.

If it be a costume play the manager

furnishes all the wardrobe, but if of a modern period the reverse is the case.

Occasionally when the sartorial requirements of a play necessitate a lavished outlay, the management shares the expense.

Fitting is sandwiched in between rehearsals. Dressmakers conversant with footlight effects are usually employed.

FLASHLIGHT ORDEAL.

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They have been known to begin at 6

BUSY AT THE DRESSMAKERS.

At 7 in the evening, possibly at 8, the actress comes to the theater to "make up."

Nervous apprehension has undoubtedly precluded the possibility of rest or sleep during the day, but scores of tele-

grams and letters of encouragement begin to arrive.

They are pinned on the wall about her mirror in accordance with a time-honored theatrical custom.

These kindly sentiments fortify her for the coming battle, and she is hardly aware of the flight of time until one hears the call boy announcing "Overture."

As a matter of fact they are so "harassed" by the strain of many weeks' preparation and the culminating excitement of the first night that the relaxation experienced when the die is cast leaves them unresponsive to either success or failure.